

- coming, and with him four hundred men, so he divided the children among Leah, Rachel and the two maidservants.
- 2 He placed the maidservants and their children first, Leah and her children next, and Rachel and Yosef last.
- 3 He, himself, went ahead of them and bowed to the ground seven times until he reached his brother.
- 4 Esav ran to meet him, embraced him, fell upon his neck and kissed him, and they [both] wept.
- כָּאִן וְעַמּוֹ אַרְבַּע מֵאוֹת אִישׁ וַיַּחֲזֵן
אֶת־הַיְלָדִים עַל־לֵאָה וְעַל־רָחֵל
וְעַל שְׁתֵּי הַשִּׁפְחוֹת:
ב וַיִּשֶׂם אֶת־הַשִּׁפְחוֹת וְאֶת־יְלָדֵיהֶן
רִאשֹׁנָה וְאֶת־לֵאָה וַיְלָדֶיהָ
אֶחָרָיִם וְאֶת־רָחֵל וְאֶת־יוֹסֵף
אֶחָרָיִם:
ג וְהוּא עָבַר לִפְנֵיהֶם וַיִּשְׁתַּחוּ
אֶרְצָה שִׁבַע פְּעָמִים עַד־גִּישָׁתוֹ
עַד־אָחִיו:
ד וַיָּרֶץ עֲשׂוֹ לִקְרָאתוֹ וַיַּחְבְּקֵהוּ
וַיִּפֹּל עַל־צַוְאָרוֹ וַיִּשְׁקֵהוּ וַיִּבְכוּ:
צוּאָרָיו קָרִי נִקּוֹד עַל וַיִּשְׁקֵהוּ

According to our Sages, this entire account is a guide for what our own conduct should be toward Esav and powers like him. So here, too, we learn that even though we are filled with trust in God and in His promises, we still must do all that we can to help ourselves: אין סומכין על הנס.

- 2 It is possible that the order was determined by sentiment and greater affection, but this is not a necessary assumption. In verses 6 and 7 we will find indications of other, more likely motives.
- 4 The word “ויבכו” (“and they wept”) attests that Esav was overcome by genuine human emotion. A kiss can be an affected gesture; not so tears that flow at such moments. (בכה — related to בקע, פקה — means: to break out in tears. Tears spring from the depths of the human soul.) This kiss and these tears show Esav, too, as a grandson of Avraham.

- 5 [Esav] looked up and saw the women and the children, and asked: Who are these to you? [Ya'akov] said: They are the children whom God has graciously given your servant.
- 6 The maidservants drew near — they and their children — and they bowed.
- 7 Leah also drew near with her children and they bowed, and afterwards Yosef and Rachel drew near, and they bowed.

ה וַיִּשָׂא אֶת-עֵינָיו וַיִּרְא אֶת-
הַנָּשִׁים וְאֶת-הַיְלָדִים וַיֹּאמֶר מִי-
אֵלֶּה לָּךְ וַיֹּאמֶר הַיְלָדִים אֲשֶׁר-
תָּנַן אֱלֹהִים אֶת-עַבְדְּךָ: רַבִּיעִי

ו וַתִּגְשָׁן וַתִּשְׁפָּחוֹת הַנָּה וַיִּלְדִּיתָן
וַתִּשְׁתַּחֲוּיָן:

ז וַתִּגְשָׁן גַּם-לֵאָה וַיִּלְדֶּיהָ וַיִּשְׁתַּחֲוּוּ
וְאַחַר נִגְשׂ יוֹסֵף וְרָחֵל וַיִּשְׁתַּחֲוּוּ:

Esav must have been more than just a wild hunter. Otherwise, how could he have succeeded in dominating the whole development of mankind? The sword alone, brute force alone, cannot accomplish this.

Esav, too, will gradually lay down his sword; more and more, he will make room for humaneness. Ya'akov will be the one to provide him with the opportunity of showing to what extent the principle of humaneness has prevailed in his heart. When the strong respects the rights of the strong, this is merely discretion. But when the strong, as Esav here, throws himself on the shoulders of the weak and casts away the sword of aggression — only then does it become clear that justice and humaneness have prevailed in his heart.

- 5 Ya'akov speaks only of the children, but his reply relates also to the question about the women. Thus, with great delicacy, he indicates a double indebtedness: physically and spiritually, he attained his treasure thanks to the grace of God and thanks also to his wives. To him, they are the mothers of his children.

- 6–7 ותגשן וגוי ותשתחוין, ותגש וגוי וישתחוו, ואחר נגש וגוי וישתחוו. The general rule is that when the predicate relates to a number of subjects, masculine and

- 8 He said: What was [the purpose of] all this camp of yours that I met? [Ya'akov] said: To find favor in the eyes of my lord.
- ח וַיֹּאמֶר מִי לָךְ כָּל הַמַּחֲנֶה הַזֶּה
אֲשֶׁר פָּגַשְׁתִּי וַיֹּאמֶר לְמַצְא־תּוֹ
בְּעֵינַי אֲדָנָי:
- 9 Esav said: I have plenty. My brother, let that which you have remain yours.
- ט וַיֹּאמֶר עֵשָׂו יִשְׁרָאֵל רַב אָחִי יְהִי
לָךְ אֲשֶׁר-לָךְ:

feminine, the predicate takes the masculine (as in verse 7). Here, however, this rule does not apply, for in verse 6 the predicate is in the feminine.

Careful consideration of these two verses reveals fine and fascinating traits, particularly the brave and noble self-respect that is characteristic of the Jewish woman, who stands tall even in time of danger, while the male — the so-called stronger sex — is at a loss.

The women and children must have heard so much of late about the bad uncle, and how greatly it must have been impressed upon them to greet him with utmost humility! Indeed, the שפחותה — “they and their children” — came forward and bowed low. This is strongly emphasized by the word “הנה,” which otherwise is entirely superfluous. Hence, וישתחוונה includes primarily the women, who, from their whole past, were accustomed to bowing even before people who were not so fearful.

Then Leah came forward, the noble, proud, and self-respecting woman, the mother of the sons and the main pillar of the house. She did *not* bow down before Esav; her children did instead of her: וישתחוו!

Then it was Rachel’s turn, but Yosef courageously stepped in front of his mother, to protect her. Rachel, fearing that Esav would take offense, quickly bowed, to mollify him, and so that Yosef, too, would bow. Thus they both bowed: וישתחוו.

Now we understand Ya’akov’s motive for arranging them in this order. He placed the maidservants first, because he could depend on them to act humbly, and Rachel and Yosef last, because he expected them to act less humbly.